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Torres, I. (2015). 'Pues tanto se esconde': Elusion at (inter)play in Ana Caro's El conde Partinuplés. *Bulletin of Spanish Studies: Hispanic Studies and Researches on Spain, Portugal and Latin America*, 92(8-10), 203-222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2015.1108094>

Published in:

Bulletin of Spanish Studies: Hispanic Studies and Researches on Spain, Portugal and Latin America

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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18 months embargo

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‘Pues tanto se esconde’: Elusion at (Inter)play in Ana Caro’s *El conde Partinuplés*

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I

The theatrical medium posits itself as a powerful metaphor through which we can imaginatively explore the drama of the individual subject;¹ enmeshing actors who anatomize the enculturated signs of character, as well as the audience who must decode these, in a liquid process of constructing and deconstructing ‘realities’. Through this interaction we try to make sense of the flux of experience, though our modes of ‘making sense’ may vary greatly, not only between the ways that the socially-situated individual may construct selfhood different from others, but also in the ways that the same individual might be compelled by theatre to contemplate him/herself in altered temporal and spatial positionings.² In the early modern period, as a new malleable self-consciousness emerged to challenge the ‘conventional signposts of social and individual identity’, dramatists explored the potency and limitations of the medium, converting the playhouse into a laboratory for the interrogation of interlocking subjective and objective worlds.³ In particular, the Renaissance stage corporealized the duality of inner self and public role, paradoxically enacting the fixation of character while

1 The idea of theatre as a metaphor has been investigated from many and various perspectives. See, for instance, as relevant to my argument, Kent T. Van den Berg’s exploration of the treatment of performance as a metaphor in a thoughtful analysis of the poetics of theatrical space (wherein the playhouse operates as architectural emblem); *Playhouse and Cosmos: Shakespearean Theater As Metaphor* (London/Toronto: Associated Universities Presses, 1985).

2 I am indebted to Stoetzler’s and Yuval-Davis’ research on situated knowledge which I have applied in broad terms to the specific context of theatre. See Marcel Stoetzler & Nira Yuval-Davis, ‘Standpoint Theory, Situated Knowledge and the Situated Imagination’, *Feminist Theory*, 3:3 (2002), 315–34.

3 See Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1986), 9.

simultaneously suggesting its insubstantiality;⁴ thereby compelling a heightened socialised hermeneutics while also urging philosophical inquiry. Spanish dramatists of the period, as we now (somewhat belatedly) appreciate,⁵ contributed to this broader European theatrical practice.⁶ Socially-stratified character 'types', inscribed with the markers of official culture, seem to reflect a need to fix the fluidity of social life, but yet accommodate in their meta-dramatic self-consciousness, the power to transcribe and transcend the roles (pre-)assigned to them.⁷ If ultimately the Spanish Golden-Age *comedia* seems to confirm collective over individual selfhood and to cede to absorbing behavioural deviance (especially, though not exclusively, in its treatment of non-conforming females), this is because character creation has made subjectively plausible a resolution that has the appearance of objective facticity.⁸ In other words, as I hope to demonstrate in this article, a play may give the final word to the reiteration of an

4 For a very detailed application of this, see Martin Andrew's discussion of Jonson's *Volpone*: '“Cut So Like Her Character”: Preconstructing Celia in *Volpone*', in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol. 8, ed. J. Leeds Barroll (Madison & Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson U. P./London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 94–119.

5 Laura Bass sums up the belated shift in *comedia* criticism: 'once judged deficient for its supposed lack of character development, the Spanish *comedia* is now more generally considered a drama of the subject articulated within the conflicting demands of social and gender positions, on the one hand, and desire, on the other [...] far from “flat types” characters in the *comedia* are multidimensional subjects' (Laura Bass, *The Drama of the Portrait: Theater and Visual Culture in Early Modern Spain* [University Park: Pennsylvania U. P., 2008], 11). The idea of character 'deficiency' found its most explicit statement in A. A. Parker's study which advocated primacy to action over character in approaching Golden-Age *comedia*; see A. A. Parker, *The Approach to the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age* (London: Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Councils, 1957).

6 The 'black legend' that leaves Spain on the margins of European intellectual and philosophical advances has been roundly rejected by, among others, Jeremy Robbins (*Arts of Perception: The Epistemological Mentality of the Spanish Baroque, 1580–1720* [Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2007]) and is a view recently reiterated in the context of *comedia* scholarship by Teresa Scott Soufas, 'Melancholy, the *Comedia* and Early Modern Psychology', in *A Companion to Early Modern Hispanic Theater*, ed. Hilaire Kallendorf (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 199–210.

7 See Andrew who refers to the processes of characterization as 'functions of both dramatist and the fashioning or self-fashioning character' in an age of increasing social mobility ("Cut So Like Her Character", 97). Andrew draws on Terry Eagleton's observations to underpin his argument (see Terry Eagleton, 'Editor's Preface', in Peter Womack, *Ben Jonson*, Rereading Literature [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986], i-x).

8 Much has been written on the issue of closure in Golden-Age drama. See, as representative: José M. Reguero, 'Textual Discontinuities and the Problems of Closure in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age', in *Cultural Authority in Golden Age Spain*, ed. Marina S. Brownlee & Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1995); Isaac Benabu, *Reading for the Stage: Calderón and His Contemporaries* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2003), Chapter 5, 'Reading Closure', 81–87; and (for a lucid discussion of critical approaches to marriage in *comedia* endings), Catherine Connor (Swietlicki), 'Marriage and Subversion in *Comedia* Endings: Problems in Art and Society', in *Gender, Identity and Representation in Spain's Golden Age*, ed. Anita K. Stoll & Dawn L. Smith (Lewisburg: Bucknell U. P., 2000), 23–46.

overarching, unifying, reality, but this reconstruction of collective identity is no less (or more) fragile than the performances of individual selfhood of which it is constituted.

For instance, I would argue the following regarding the theatre of the Spanish Baroque: it is appropriate to think about characterization in terms of provisional performances of subjectivity (against the still prevailing reliance on stock characters as pre-constructed and superimposed 'signposts'); that it is pertinent to consider the reiterated signs of *comedia* (take 'mujer' as an example), as not only constitutive of reality, but often pointing to a reconfiguration of dominant epistemological truths and societal norms; that we should be sensitive to emulative strategies of non-identical repetition that at once sustain analogy (the *leitmotif* of 'Renaissance') and yet seem to fracture the univocal; and, finally, that we can approach these plays through a blending of the poetic (with attention to centripetal motion) and the performative (centrifugal) without conjuring away mimetic or referential interpretation. Within this paradigm, the Baroque play will still emerge as an Aristotelian 'espejo', a metaphor Lope de Vega was fond of exploiting, but one that projects a shimmering composite image of shadow and future selves, thereby containing something of an allegorical flow and of Platonic recollection within it.⁹ Moreover, it is my contention that reconciliation of these perceived contradictions is enabled by a critical synthesis (a blending of inscription and transcription) that not only closes the gap between text (where text is *écriture* and also the shared ideological script) and theatricality, but which also draws attention to the generative and potentially transcendent nature of their interference.

Some years ago, in a study of performative metaphor, Hubert defined drama as 'a fugal interplay between illusion and elusion', pointing to two principal cleavages between mimesis and performance (illusion) and between a character's assigned part and actual performance (the deferral or suspension inherent in elusion).¹⁰ In an earlier study by the same author,

9 Aristotle connected self-knowledge and mirroring by suggesting that a friend is a mirror in whom we can see reflected visions of ourselves; self-knowledge being a fundamental part of the virtuous life in Aristotelian ethics (see, for instance, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b, 33 and *Magna moralia*, 1213a, 22–24, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols, ed. Jonathan Barnes [New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991]). The *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Magna moralia* are included in volume 2. While Lope's view of the play as an 'espejo de las costumbres' as set out in the *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* (ed. Juana de José Prades [Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1971], l. 123) seems to owe more to Cicero, he also plays with the metaphor in several of his dramas in ways that suggest Aristotelian intervention, e.g. in Act I of *El castigo sin venganza* the Duke refers to the play as a mirror in conversation with Ricardo (ll. 215–25) framing more conventionally the Aristotelian moment that is problematized when Aurora glimpses her beloved Federico kissing his stepmother Casandra. See Lope de Vega, *El castigo sin venganza*, ed. Antonio Carreño (Madrid: Cátedra, 1993).

10 See Judd D. Hubert, *Corneille's Performative Metaphors* (Charlottesville: Rockwood Press, 1997), 5–7.

Hamlet's delay in killing his father had been cited as a prime example of the latter: 'a star performer, dissatisfied with his assignment, who reluctantly consents to participate in the action, but only on his own terms'.¹¹ I do not espouse Hubert's somewhat narrow appreciation of what he calls the 'sociological method', a prejudice that emerges very forcefully in an article co-written with Franco Tonelli in which they allow for the emergence of world view as theatrical presence only in those 'very exceptional' instances of 'artists who are consciously at odds with the establishment'.¹² Rather, I would contend, that all knowledge and imagination are socially situated, and while each category of character draws on its own discursive ontological basis (and is created around shared traits, including gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity), that in the participatory space of theatrical performance, identities are constructed, authorized and contested in relation to each other and to the audience as a crucial third party in the interaction.¹³ 'World view' should be privileged, therefore, in our thinking about the 'presence' that is at play in theatre as a complex concept that encompasses narratives of personal and collective memories, lending cognitive, imaginative and affective endorsement or denial to the dramatic action as it unfolds. However, notwithstanding this departure from Hubert and Tonelli, the illusion/elusion argument they advance is located very insightfully within a theory of 'double movement', formulated as a shift from inscription (the text) to transcription (interpretive performance),¹⁴ that is flexible enough as a paradigm to be usefully opened out and reformulated in order to embrace the complex, myriad movements that characterize *comedia*. In the adapted schema I propose here, 'inscription' refers not just to the text that generates the performance, but also to the socio-political pre-texts and literary intertexts inscribed within it, non-identically 'repeated' and therefore constitutively fluid, bearing and receiving new disclosures and refining existing identities; while 'transcription' points to the unfolding spectacle and the potential for transcendence inherent in the extravagant excesses produced by the self-

11 See Judd D. Hubert, *Metatheater: The Example of Shakespeare* (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1991), 88.

12 See Franco Tonelli & Judd Hubert, 'Theatricality: The Burden of the Text', *SubStance*, 6–7:21 (1978–79), 79–102 (p. 93).

13 I have drawn very broadly from the work of feminist sociologists on intersectionality insofar as it accounts for the multiple grounds of identity to be apprehended when considering how the social world is constructed. See Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 'Standpoint Theory'; also Nina Yuval-Davis, 'Intersectionality and Feminist Politics', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13:3 (2006), 193–209, who draws (among others) on the work of Avtar Brah & Ann Phoenix, 'Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5:3 (2004), 75–86.

14 Tonelli & Hubert, 'Theatricality', 85–86. Their 'double movement' theory is particularly interesting in its accommodation of interpretation as part of the process of writing itself.

referential codes of the text.¹⁵ The latter includes explicit forms such as the play within the play, cross-dressing or role assumption, but is manifest also through over-determined linguistic patterning (e.g. insistent metaphorical configurations), the rupturing interventions of 'apartes' and the elaborate staging that in the Baroque period were especially characteristic of the *comedia de santos* and the highly spectacular *comedia de apariencias*.

* * * * *

My focus in this article is on Ana Caro's play, *El conde Partinuplés*, as demonstrative of the potential of this synthesizing approach to illuminate the issues outlined above, and also to accommodate the key strands of critical enquiry that have governed the play's reception to date.¹⁶ The objective is to move beyond these, to break out of the circularity that persists (e.g. the constant coming back round to the unsettling marriage-closure formula of the *dénouement*) and to reformulate the questions that have been asked of the material; to suggest, moreover, that if we have problems with the depiction of characters who are given unconventional platforms from which to speak, then perhaps there remains some inadequacy in the concept of 'character' as we understand it for *comedia* and that we should be encouraged to confront that. A case in point is the 'mujer esquivá', a character type defined by McKendrick as a variation on (and most significant manifestation of) the 'mujer varonil'.¹⁷ She is central to the plot and themes of Golden-Age drama because in her refusal to marry she rebels not against the unjust conventions of patriarchal society, but against the natural order of the world

15 The synthesizing approach I propose here should mitigate against the risk that Van den Berg identified in metacriticism which he positioned at the extreme end of theatrical criticism: 'for even when the metaplay is considered as a text for performance, it is perceived as a "closed system" that converts its relations to actors and audience, as well as to the ostensible subjects and themes, into aspects of its reflexive relation to itself' (*Playhouse and Cosmos*, 15).

16 *El conde Partinuplés* (first published in 1653, composition date disputed) is one of only two extant plays written by the poet/dramatist Ana Caro Mallén de Soto, although there is evidence that she wrote many more, and that these were performed to rapturous reception both in Madrid and Seville. Her corpus includes *relaciones* (on festivities in Seville 1628, 1633 and 1635), two *autos sacramentales*, a *loa sacramental* and *décimas* dedicated to her friend, the writer, Doña María de Zayas y Sotomayor. María José Delgado provides the most complete synthesis of extant documentation relating to Caro's life and work: see 'Ana Caro: vida y producción literaria', in *Las comedias de Ana Caro. 'Valor, agravio y mujer' y 'El conde Partinuplés'*, ed., estudio & notas de María José Delgado (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 1–19; although Delgado and all subsequent scholarship on Caro owe a debt to the pioneering work of Lola Luna. Throughout this article I will refer to the following edition: Ana Caro, *El conde Partinuplés*, ed., intro. & notas de Lola Luna (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1993). All verse references will be given in parenthesis. Lola designates the play a 'comedia de apariencias' ('Introducción', 1–75 [p.47]).

17 See Melveena McKendrick, *Women and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the 'mujer varonil'* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1974), 142–44.

as divinely decreed. For, as the plays of the period demonstrate, the Baroque *comedia* tends not to carry its Neoplatonic inheritance lightly.¹⁸ In practical application, Platonic theories of universal harmony are transferred into a Christian social context, wherein the rejection of love by the 'esquiva' ('as an integral feature of universal harmony') equates to a two-fold renunciation: of her place in the social hierarchy (as wife and mother), and of a philosophy of life that sustains that hierarchy. The re-alignment of the 'disdainful' female with order and nature was, therefore, essential and was generally symbolized through marriage.¹⁹ McKendrick acknowledges that the complexity of motivations for 'esquivez' may vary from one dramatist to another, but that all subscribe to the same basic tenets: 'even Doña Ana Caro, whose *El conde Partinuplés* [...] is the only play [...] in which a woman depicts a "mujer esquiva"'.²⁰ Yet subsequent responses to the play have struggled to accommodate the predicament, motivations and actions of Caro's protagonist, the Empress Rosaura, within McKendrick's model.²¹ Is she cast against type or is character 'type', in this case, a distracting (anachronistically-imposed) red herring? Alternative theories would let us break out of the mould. Following Butler's frame work for identity performativity, for instance, we might explore to what extent the narrative of Rosaura's role pre-exists its playing at a particular point in time,²² and consider whether her engagement with historically-authorized practices constitute acts of repetition and/or resistance.²³ And where Butler is less sensitive to relationality we might supplement the approach by taking into

18 See, for instance, Adrienne Martín's recent analysis of the pedagogy of love in two Lope plays (*La dama boba* and *El animal de Hungría*) which, in the case of *La dama boba*, reflects upon the substantiality of the play's philosophical substratum: 'Learning through Love in Lope de Vega's Drama', in *Women's Literacy in Early Modern Spain and the New World*, ed. Anne J. Cruz & Rosilie Hernández (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 177–90 (especially pp. 177–81).

19 McKendrick, *Women and Society*, 172–73 (p. 172).

20 McKendrick, *Women and Society*, 172 (emphasis retained from McKendrick).

21 Soufas substitutes the term for 'párthenos' (the unmarried female in the period between control of father and husband); de Armas invalidates it (Rosaura is not a true 'mujer esquiva'), while Maroto confirms it (Rosaura is a good fit for the 'esquiva' category). See Teresa Scott Soufas, 'Marrying Off the "Párthenos" in Caro's *El conde Partinuplés*', in *Engendering the Early Modern Stage: Women Playwrights in the Spanish Empire*, ed. Valerie Hegstrom & Amy R. Williamsen (New Orleans: Univ. Press of the South, 1999), 93–106; Frederick A. de Armas, *The Invisible Mistress: Aspects of Feminism and Fantasy in the Golden Age* (Charlottesville: Biblioteca Siglo de Oro, 1976), 176–77; Mercedes Maroto Camino, 'Negotiating Women: Ana Caro's *El conde Partinuplés* and Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 26:2 (2007), 199–216 (203).

22 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990).

23 See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York/London: Routledge, 1993), 227.

account how dialogue constructs identity as reflective and constitutive,²⁴ and so acknowledge how certain theatrical techniques allow for the transcendence of pre-given discourse (those that 'mask' the 'I' or blur 'I'/'other' boundaries, such as the use of portrait, disguise or role assumption). In the transformative space of the stage, 'going with' the inscribed script is illusion, 'going beyond' it as elicited by active, embodied, engagement, is elusion, or, to 'transform' a more familiar label, we might choose to call this 'esquivez'.

The analysis that follows will probe how aspects of this more fluid approach to inscription and transcription coalesce in the character of Rosaura, often considered a figural analogue of Caro herself,²⁵ though I will also consider (as appropriate to the dialogic dimension of theatre), relationality and recognition (as a double-edged act in itself). Rosaura will emerge as the play's elusive 'star performer'—dissatisfied with an assignment inscribed with contradictory stimuli, but who consents to participate reluctantly and then to transcribe her performance on her own terms.²⁶ As we shall see, at the core of Caro's play is the sense of life apprehended in mirroring, to recognize and be recognized, but also an awareness of reflection as reiteration, provisional, subject to revision, renewal, and, above all, referral to the exigencies of space, time and the comingling tensions of reason and instinct. Self-knowledge, as performed by the characters in *El conde Partinuplés*, cannot accept fixity, nor find a way through the real via a skin-deep skimming of the surface. The challenge is always to measure lack with lack (matter that seems deficient in meaning, spirit that falls short on the real), to mediate both inner and outward perspectives, to take the indirect route to knowledge by decoding the signs along the way; signs that are in themselves provocative allegories of linked

24 The emphasis on the dialogical aspect of theatre practice for identity construction can be traced back to Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal work, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: The Univ. of Texas Press, 1981).

25 There is much speculation around biographical data (in fact although Caro is referred to as 'la décima musa sevillana' it is unclear whether Seville was her natural or adopted home), but one thing emerges clearly—Caro was, as Luna has evidenced, a writer 'de oficio'. See Lola Luna, 'Ana Caro, una escritora "de oficio" del Siglo de Oro', in *An Issue of Gender: Women's Perceptions and Perceptions of Women in Hispanic Society and Literature*, ed. Ann L. Mackenzie & Dorothy S. Severin, intro. by Ann L. Mackenzie, *BHS*, LXXII:1 (1995), 11–26. As such Caro was implicated in male-dominated systems of cultural exchange and capital, involved in networks of academies, and the power dynamics of literary patronage (there are, for instance, extant dedications to the Conde-duque Olivares). See also Alicia R. Zuese, 'Ana Caro and the Literary Academies of Seventeenth-Century Spain', in *Women's Literacy in Early Modern Spain*, ed. Cruz & Hernández, 191–208.

26 Rosaura could be added to the female protagonists identified by Vidler as those who 'escape categorization in a feminist context', but I am less comfortable with Vidler's designation of these women as 'exceptional'. See Laura L. Vidler, *Performance Reconstruction and Spanish Golden Age Drama: Reviving and Revising the 'Comedia'* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 108.

symbols. Firstly, however, before turning to a brief review of the play's critical reception, let us recall how the plot of the play contrives to foreground the dyadic relationship of recognition and identity that informs the principal characters' subjective negotiation of their world (a process of encounters that appears ultimately to be resolved in a compromised 'in-between' state of becoming, selves that are never wholly individual nor collective).²⁷

In Constantinople in an undetermined present, the Empire is collapsing in chaos. 'Sucesor pide el Imperio' (1) There is pressure on the unmarried Empress, Rosaura, to marry in order to produce an heir. It is an 'obligación' that she recognizes, reluctantly, and accepts—despite a prophecy that had foretold the downfall of the realm through the treachery of a suitor. But this is acceptance on Rosaura's terms. She requests, and is given, a year in which to find a husband. The predicament is postponed in an attitude of 'resolución heroica', managed by magic, resolved ultimately in marriage. Rosaura's cousin Aldora presents a vision of possible suitors from which Rosaura identifies 'el conde Partinuplés' as the object of her affection. He encounters her initially in a series of *simulacra*: portrait, wild beast, hologram and then in the sumptuous surroundings of a 'castillo bellissimo', as a mistress whose voice he can hear, but is not permitted to see. He does not appear to recognize this female presence as the origin of the image that had provoked his rejection of Lisbella, his cousin and betrothed. 'Si me buscas, me hallarás' (633), the image challenges him, a riddle reiterated in chorus by the castle's invisible choir. The call and echo, aided in no small way by the misogynistic rantings of his servant Gaulín, release the curse of Psyche, Orpheus, Actaeon and Eve—the very human curiosity to see what is desired and withheld. The sleeping Rosaura is illuminated, revealed, recognized and betrayed. 'Muera el conde' (1722) is Rosaura's response. Magic intervenes again. In a new 'invención', Aldora disguises Partinuplés for a role in the 'torneo' that will produce a victor and husband for the Empress. Rosaura sees, but does not recognize the Conde, '¿quién sois caballero?' (2084) He reveals himself, is recognized and ambivalently claimed, 'Yo soy tuya' (2092).

27 In a recent Kierkegaardian-inspired reflection on the real as repetition, Catherine Pickstock offers the following understanding of the human being's subjective investment with reality: 'We negotiate the world through the process of recognition. This means that we must, at every turn, identify anew everything that we encounter'. When this process is impeded or blocked, she suggests that we are lost in confusion, which at its most extreme results in a loss of sense of self. External acts of recognition and access to self-knowledge are therefore interdependent components of an ontological circuit: 'Without knowing who we are, we cannot know which paths to take, which turn is ours, nor what we are to do when we arrive. And without a sense of the roles that we are to borrow or the masks we are to assume, nor the anticipatory maps of space to be encountered and scripts to be performed at future moments [...] we cannot reflexively identify our own subjectivity and perhaps can have no sense of self-identity at all' (Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity* [Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2013], 1).

Despite McKendrick's dismissal of the play as 'extremely bad' (in 1906 Milton A. Buchanan had referred to it a little more positively as 'mediocre'), it has been the object of substantial critical scrutiny since the 1970s, impelled in great part by the production of modern editions (Luna, Delgado and Scott Soufas) and by bio-bibliographical studies like that of Amy Kaminsky.²⁸ Two responses have dominated critical enquiry, both of which might be located along the axis of intertextual, intercultural and ideological inscription: on the one hand, analysis of the play's imaginative re-conceptualization of source material and, on the other, discussions that prioritize a gender bias or proto-feminist perspective. There is some inevitable entanglement in these approaches, areas of ideological concurrence, but also of contradiction between and within them. Most attention has focused on the play's relationship to the anonymous twelfth-century French chivalric romance *Partonopeus de Blois* (1188), and to the frequently reprinted Spanish prose translation of 1497 (Seville), although the kernel of the plot, a woman's use of magic to entrap the object of her desire, has roots that go back to the fairy mistress of Celtic folklore and beyond.²⁹ The French chapbook is considered a particularly significant intermediary for it is within this frame work of romance that the 'invisible mistress' plot rewrites the gender roles of the Cupid and Psyche myth (the longest interpolated tale of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*) and overturns misogynistic narratives that had held sway for centuries. The curiosity of Psyche is a shifting sign in Apuleius' narrative that links the beautiful object of Cupid's affection to the protagonist/narrator Lucius, whose transformation into an ass is the result of a potent degrading combination—sensual infatuation (of a slave girl Photis) and debased curiosity that takes him towards magic and away from the higher mysteries for which he had been prepared. Transformation of this 'improspera curiositas' into the tragic flaw of the chivalric hero, was a much more radical

28 See the following respectively: McKendrick, *Women and Society*, 172, n. 1; Milton A. Buchanan, 'Partinuplés de Bles. An Episode in Tirso's *Amar por señas*. Lope's *La viuda valenciana*', *Modern Language Notes*, 21:1 (1906), 3–8 (p. 6); *Women's Acts: Plays by Women Dramatists of Spain's Golden Age*, ed., introd & notes by Teresa Scott Soufas (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1997), 137–62; Amy Kaminsky, 'Ana Caro Mallén de Soto', in *Spanish Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, ed. Linda Gould Levine, Ellen Engelson Marson & Gloria Feiman Waldman (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 86–97.

29 On the play's relationship to its models see the following as representative: **Luna, 'Introducción', in *El conde Partinuplés*, ed. Luna, 28–32 (French sources), 35–40 (chapbook), 40–44 (mythical models, with reference also to Fulgentius)**; de Armas, *The Invisible Mistress*, 19–20; Elizabeth J. Ordóñez, 'Woman and Her Text in the Works of María de Zayas and Ana Caro', *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, 19:1 (1985), 3–15 (who argues for a more self-conscious anxiety of authorship in women-authored text); Rina Walthaus, 'La comedia de Doña Ana Caro Mallén de Soto', in *Estudios sobre escritoras hispánicas en honor de Georgina Sabat-Rivers*, ed. Lou Charnon-Deutsch (Madrid: Castalia, 1992), 326–41 (pp. 332–33) who focuses on chivalric models noting especially Caro's suppression of eroticism; and Judith's Whitenack's more detailed scrutiny of the plays engagement with chivalric sources, 'Ana Caro's Partinuplés and the Chivalric Tradition', in *Engendering the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Hegstrom & Williamsen, 51–71.

redirection of the weaknesses of Eve and all her mythical descendants than Fulgentius' fifth-century Platonizing allegory.³⁰ Interestingly, the tendency among modern commentators has been to accept Caro's engagement with the gender dynamics of the myth as mediated by the French chapbook, despite the popularity and availability of Apuleius in the period, and the coincidence of several conceptual components that inform symbolic interaction in both the play and in its mythical model: among these, women competing in the realm of *simulacra* (Psyche/Venus; Rosaura/Lisbella); shared shifts in perspectives of curiosity and envy, and the sense of life as a series of non-identical repetitions and/or of 'testing grounds', imagined and real, where 'being human' rises and falls, dependent upon the choices made.³¹ Commentators have been keener to engage with Caro's more explicit redeployment of contemporary models, to acknowledge some intertextual merging with Lope's *La viuda valenciana*, but to linger longer over the presence of Calderón's *La vida es sueño* as a destabilizing hypotext.³²

Almost without exception, critics have scrutinized Caro's choices of dominant model and deviations from identified antecedents as indicative of authorial purpose, ranging from role inversion as reflective of the female author's own relationship to the text (Rosaura as analogue, Aldora as analogue, both operating in this role together) to the appeal of an anonymous antecedent for a female author interested in writing back against, and into, literary lineage.³³ Notwithstanding Delgado's more idiosyncratic reading of

30 Fulgentius read the *Metamorphoses* as platonic, redemptive, allegory, as the drama of a soul lost and found. Most recent commentators agree that the story of Cupid and Psyche has a special significance for this interpretation of the text. However, the less than smooth integration of Platonic duality, as well as the conflicting conclusions of the ending, suggest that the didactic purpose of the text was 'far from straightforward'. See, for instance, Paula James, *Unity in Diversity: A Study of Apuleius' 'Metamorphoses'* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1987), 126. I have consulted the following edition: Apuleius, *Cupid and Psyche*, ed., trans. & intro. by E. J. Kenney (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1990).

31 In Apuleius Psyche as human *simulacrum* of Venus calls the latter's immortality into question, renders pointless the judgment of Paris and consequential suffering, and is the catalyst of the deity's envy that drives the narrative. Only by overcoming the trials set by Venus can Psyche transcend the human flaws that have impeded her throughout and attain immortality in union with Cupid.

32 Juan Luis Montousse Vega, following Genette's theory of hypertextuality, argues for a reading of the play derived from a single transformed source ('"Si me buscas, me hallarás": la configuración del discurso femenino en la comedia de Ana Caro *El conde de Partinuplés*', *Archivum*, 44–45:2 [1994–95], 7–27); Christopher B. Weimar analyses the play as heuristic imitation of Calderón's *La vida es sueño* ('Ana Caro's *El conde de Partinuplés* and Calderón's *La vida es sueño*: Protofeminism and Heuristic Imitation', *Bulletin of the Comediantes*, 52:1 [2001], 123–46); Maroto Camino ('Negotiating Women') who also sees the play as a reworking of Calderón, adds to Weimar's list of coincidences and divergences, but finds compromise in the ending where Weimar finds defiance.

33 See Frederick A. de Armas, 'Mirrors and Matriline: (In)Visibilities in Ana Caro's *El conde de Partinuplés*', in *Engendering the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Hegstrom & Williamsen, 75–91 (p. 80).

the play as an allegory of Philip III's relationship with Lerma,³⁴ these gender-biased readings fall into two camps: those who contend that the play argues for a potent female agency and for an alternative feminine configuration of authority, and those who point to the resolution in conventional marriage as a compromise with patriarchy, and thus as a disturbing re-inscription into the norm. In short, these binary positions struggle to account for Rosaura's falling short of an ideal (María Cristina Quintero points to what might be considered her 'less than admirable' behaviour).³⁵ It is a notion that each group 'fixes' in different way. For instance: a dominant strand of thought implicitly and/or explicitly follows McKendrick, and, cognisant of *comedia's* social stratification as an expression of Neoplatonic inheritance (often grafted onto Petrarchan metaphors), and operating within a Christian social context, emphasizes how natural order requires female acceptance of a subordinate, silent role, confined to the realm of the domestic (supported by, among others, the writings of Thomas Aquinas, Fray Luis de León and Luis Vives); an alternative view has been sensitive to Rosaura's possible alignment, or not, with exceptional, exemplary historical female counterparts, such as the two Isabels, of Spain and England;³⁶ or has argued for the female character's uniquely ventriloquizing role for the voice of the female author, and, by extension, the 'distinctive' group of which she is a member. None of these various impulses 'trouble' gender in the way that Butler (or indeed, perhaps, Caro) might have wished, for at their core is an implicit acquiescence with a notion of female selfhood (the individual woman) as a stable subject, a member of some form of homogeneous grouping, and bearing the burden of that inscription. For most commentators Rosaura either renegotiates or conforms to this conditioning. Only in Luna's study of the play, does one sense an intuitive awareness of the problems inherent in this partial construing of authorial intention that is circumscribed within the category of 'inscription'. But her response is to propose an alternative demarcation, to separate the inscribed from transcription in Hubert's pure use of the term, to argue for the superiority of semiotics, and so to focus her analysis on the visual, and the potential significance of spectacle. My

34 See Delgado, *Las comedias de Ana Caro*, ed. Delgado, 152–59.

35 See Maria Cristina Quintero's 'Epilogue' to her fascinating study of monarchy in the personae of powerful on-stage queens, *Gendering the Crown in the Spanish Baroque 'Comedia'* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 215–22 (p. 217).

36 Soufas (*Women's Acts*, 43–44) provides a historical context for the disorder in Isabel and Elizabeth 1; Jonathan Ellis ('Royal Obligation and the "Uncontrolled" Female in Ana Caro's *El conde Partinuplés*', *Bulletin of the Comediantes*, 62:1 [2010], 15–30) follows Soufas' lead to Isabel as model while challenging her earlier 'párthenos' argument. María M. Carrión finds a more compelling model in Elizabeth I for Rosaura's strategy of postponement ('Portrait of a Lady: Marriage, Postponement, and Representation in Ana Caro's *El conde Partinuplés*', *Modern Language Notes*, 114:2 [1999], 241–68). See also Thomas Finn, 'Women's Kingdoms: Female Monarchs by Two Women Dramatists of Seventeenth-Century Spain and France', *Bulletin of the Comediantes*, 59:1 (2007), 131–48, who notes how the transitory female ruler parallels a rethinking of women's position in European society of the time (134, 139).

contention is that only a synthesizing approach to Caro's play that integrates inscription and transcription (and so illusion and elusion), will accommodate the terrain of conflictive relations among women (in the rivalry between Rosaura and Lisbella), as well as woman-woman alliance (Rosaura-Aldora and finally Rosaura-Lisbella), allowing for a reshaping of the 'res' that is 'mujer'—the substance of the ideal—and thus reaffirming the notion of multiple embodiments of ideological markers, such as heroism, rather than myriad reflections of an established fixed notion.

II

We come now to the enigma that is Rosaura:

Conde	¿no ves la fiera del bosque, Gaulín?
Gaulín	Admirado estoy, ¡qué divinas perfecciones!
Conde	<i>Bella esfinge</i> , aún más incierta después de verte es mi vida. A espacio matas dormida, Aprisa vences despierta. Confusa el alma concierta sus daños anticipados, (1683–91; emphasis added)

At this climactic moment of the final act, the 'curious' Conde has made the mistress visible, and he contemplates the chimerical ideal with a less than perfect apprehension of the world. The mythical sphinx of Thebes had demanded the answer to a seemingly simple riddle that was handed down to her by the Muses; a question aligned appropriately with the hybrid qualities of the winged creature who asked it: 'what has one voice, becomes four-footed, two-footed and then three-footed?' To fail to answer correctly was to be devoured by the monster. Only the hero Oedipus had the power to resolve the riddle and, in so doing, to demonstrate the human being's special aptitude for symbolic action. Much has been made of the riddle of the sphinx: it has been variously interpreted as man's confrontation with, and resistance to, the seductive enigma of women, the triumph of masculine principles of reason over feminine principles of nature, as a celebration of artistic mastery (the emulative artist who grapples with the mysteries of the Muses, locking the gaze of a monstrous tradition with vital consequences), and in its broadest terms, as a figure for allegory itself. There is another way of thinking about this that has implications for how we might see it projected in Caro's play. Oedipus' movement through the literal surface of language to access the trajectory of being (the child on all fours, the adult erect and in his prime, the old person stooping to the cane), is not an epistemological one that privileges the answer, but an ontological move that dramatizes a

position on language, and (following Burke) beyond language, that privileges the imaginative, metaphorical dimensions of the human subject.³⁷ In this context, the Conde's failure to access the recurring language of the 'enigma hermosa' ('Si me buscas, me hallarás' is first articulated Act I, 633, repeated in the castle by the 'coro' [900]), and to decode the emblematic letters 'R' and 'A' written on Rosaura's portrait, are anti-Oedipal gestures, a deviant transcription as it were, that suggests a type of heroic deflation that is more problematically charged than a subversion of inscribed conventional chivalric and/or Petrarchan ideals would convey.³⁸ Up to this point in the play, the Conde exhibits little understanding of his 'borrowed' roles, nor consequently of the scripts to be performed, nor how to decode the signs along the way. So when, impelled by 'curiosidad', he breaks his word to Rosaura (1672–75), there is more at stake in the transgression than the mirroring of myth or the fulfilment of a prophecy she has grown up to fear. Partinuplés exposes a depth of self-*unawareness* that spins, reverberates, and recoils in, and beyond, what Williams (following Kenneth Burke) has termed the 'human problematic of language';³⁹ which in the fluid spaces and speeches of theatre, finds its most representative environment. If we accept the view that drama treats 'language and thought as modes of action', then this particular play, in its efforts to engage us in the questions of who we are, takes great pains to prove substantial in itself.⁴⁰ It does this by flaunting the dynamic interaction of elusion and illusion. I would like now to suggest how this is accomplished in the opening act.

Unlike the Conde, the Empress Rosaura is all too aware of who she is, the paths she has to take and what she has to do when she arrives. She has worn the mask of Empress since birth and baulks neither at the prospect of marriage, nor at the rationale for it ('y no les falta / razón' [105–06]), but is outraged at the violent assault on her 'decoro' (97). The linguistic stratification of the speech acts with which the play opens, reveals no ambiguity about the relative status of the interlocutors in the hierarchical

37 See Kenneth Burke, 'Dramatism', in *Communication: Concepts and Perspectives*, ed. Lee Thayer (Washington D.C.: Spartan Books/London: Macmillan, 1967), 327–60; a shorter version appears in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, 18 vols (New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1968–1979), VII, 445–52. David Cratis Williams reflects on what he calls the 'ontological loop' in the critical orientations of Burke's theory of language as symbolic action. See 'Under the Sign of (An)Nihilation: Burke in the Age of Nuclear Destruction and Critical Deconstruction', in *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*, ed. Herbert W. Simons & Trevor Melia (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 196–224 (especially pp. 218–19).

38 See Carrión, 'Portrait of a Lady', 244–45, for discussion of the various decodings of the portrait (especially the reaction of Gaulín, a misogynistic tirade developed through accumulation and repetition that finds a deviant reiteration in Aldora's parallel speech act (264).

39 See Williams, 'Under the Sign of (An)Nihilation', 217.

40 See Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1945), xxii.

order, and the whole speech event of the opening scenes is in fact a 'co-operative' effort in which all the participants recognize a common purpose within a shared frame of reference, if not a mutually-accepted direction. Rosaura pins her reluctance to participate on the supernatural, rather than the anti-natural—setting out the 'causa' in a prophecy that foretold of a treacherous future husband that would bring down the kingdom (118–94). What is 'out of joint' here is time and timing. The intensification of the present that is fundamental to theatricality is concretised in the dual inscription of time on the problem and on the solution.⁴¹ Forms of temporality are weighted in the moment, affecting the representation and comprehension of order and its underside. Rosaura's invocation of the past to forestall the future, her advisors' obsessive recurrence to the temporal exigencies of 'carpe diem' ('Cásate pues, que no es justo / que dejes pasar la aurora / de tu edad tierna' [71–73]) are mutually incompatible time schemes. The conflict is resolved in an agreed postponement set at a year. Aided by Aldora, Rosaura will take her own 'turns' during that time, will seek 'correspondencia' in love as a means of rewriting the omens (202), will assume provisional masks and step in and out of visibility and the fantasy castle. In Act II Rosaura's seduction of the Conde (implied at 1075) is followed by an audience with the other three prospective suitors (1103–261). For this is not a dream play, celebrating the overthrow of law. Unlike Elizabeth I's intentional communicative misfires (when compelled to deal with the question of marriage in parliament Elizabeth referred to 'a convenient time', or further time, deferring her answer without denying the possibility nor accepting an imposed time limit),⁴² Rosaura will not violate the maxim. She intends to marry within the year, and she does. The 'mujer esquivo' label, contested by critics in their appraisal of Rosaura is, as suggested earlier, irrelevant here. We are dealing with 'elusion' on an entirely different generative level; powered by envy, and transcribed into an alternative mapping of illusory encounters.

Unlike her romance counterpart Melior, Rosaura has no magic powers of her own, but it is possible that the displacement of magic as an instrument of resolution, from Rosaura to Aldora, is an extension of the humanizing approach taken to the depiction of Melior in the Spanish version of the

41 Thornton Wilder observed: 'A play is what takes place [...] On the stage it is always now', as cited by Manfred Pfister, *Das Drama* (München: Fink, 1977), 359. The intertextual schema of Caro's play ensures a complex temporal layering that comprises other contexts of understanding, but these are enveloped in a present moment created through various performative modes: Rosaura's repeated calls on her audience's attention here (e.g. 'escuchadme atentos' [148]); interventions which mark out contemporary politics (enmity with France and the French [1737]); metatheatrical asides (Gaulín's identification of female authorship, 'Descuidóse la poeta' [612]); and concretizing in language the illusion-making devices of the stage (Gaulín's comments on the use of the 'tramoya' [1857]).

42 See Carrión ('Portrait of a Lady', 254–58) for a lucid synthesis of Elizabeth's relevant speeches.

French twelfth-century romance—where, as Dayle Seidenspinner-Núñez points out, a series of ‘important qualifications’ of the power of magic undermine its mediating force in a conflict waged between the imperatives of society and love.⁴³ This emphasis in the Spanish version of the romance on more imperfect human modes of behaviour is deepened in Caro’s play into a repositioning of the female subject’s natural predisposition to curiosity and, especially, to envy.⁴⁴ Rosaura is allowed to assert this aspect of her socially-defined personality in creative and strategically-viable ways. Going against the grain of Kierkegaard who associates envy with ‘unhappy self-assertion’,⁴⁵ I would suggest that Caro transforms a static sign of deficiency, or lack, into a mobilising, affective stance. Aldora points out that of all the suitors whose images feature in the simulated ‘examen de maridos’, only marriage to Partinuplés, heir to the French throne, is blocked by betrothal and is, therefore, impossible. Rosaura’s response:

[Rosaura:]	¡Ay Aldora! A no tenerlo [<i>impedimento</i>], otro me agradara, otro fuera, en mi grandeza empeño de importancia su elección; pero si le miro ajeno, ¿cómo es posible dejar <i>por envidia o por deseo,</i> <i>de intentar un imposible</i> , aun siendo sus gracias menos? [...] Yo lo difícil intento, lo fácil es para todos. [...]
Aldora:	Yo haré que un retrato tuyo sea brevemente objeto de su vista, porque amor comience a hacer sus efectos.

43 See Dayle Seidenspinner-Núñez, ‘Symmetry of Form and Emblematic Design in *El conde Partinuplés*’, *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 30:1 (1983), 61–76 (p. 69). Note however that where the role of magic is gradually erased in the Spanish version of the romance, Aldora continues to perform as an intermediary right up until the final scenes of Caro’s play. The demythification of her powers communicated mostly via the *gracioso* Gaulín.

44 Caro confronts both the gender bias in the ethical norms of her day and society’s imposition of silence on the female by allowing Rosaura to ‘own’ and so reformulate the dogma. See for instance, her claims to curiosity: ‘Si hacer quieres lo que dices, / presto prima, presto, presto, / pues sabes que las mujeres / pecamos en el extremo / de curiosas’ (313–17).

45 Admiration is, on the other hand, ‘happy self-surrender’. See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (1849) ed. & trans., with intro. & notes, by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1980), 86.

Ven conmigo. (376–429; emphasis added)

To date Rosaura's human imperfections have been accommodated by critics via the compensatory mode of Aldora's magical interventions. Following Ordoñez's lead, for instance, several commentators have read 'anxiety of authorship' into the more self-conscious illusory aspects of the drama, finding in Aldora's *mise en abîme*, the makings of an alternative female economy, a fantasy of power wherein the prevalent social grammar which rejects woman as subject is radically reversed.⁴⁶ Aldora's involvement is understood as either a temporary inscription of authority and/or a commentary on the creative process wherein female creativity is illuminated as a springboard to potent performance. Quintero is representative of this approach: 'El conde Partinuplés is a play written by a woman which dramatizes women looking and holding the look, women desiring, women manipulating courtship and marriage on their own terms'.⁴⁷ The metatheatrical strategies of the play are thus evoked to counteract the perceived problem of Rosaura's alignment with stereotypical female flaws; the weight of audience attention thought to be directed elsewhere. My own preference is to respect the text's insistence on the dialectic of elusion (Rosaura's reluctance to play the part assigned except on her own terms, and to recognize the inscription of envy in these 'terms') and illusion (the mechanism which transcribes emotional response through performance, ultimately legitimizing an alternative epistemological and ethical system). Rosaura's envy is both a critical mode of resistance to empty idealization and an enabling condition whose trajectory moves outwards from the individual ego, through virtual worlds with their own internal laws and fantasies of being, into a public domain of signification. Like the *simulacra* into which Rosaura herself is transformed, the additional spaces stimulated by Aldora (the hunt in the wood, the boat trip to the castle, the sumptuous interior), are provocatively burdened by intertextual traces (e.g. judgments of Paris that produce no violent conflict; a missing Palinurus that conveys the absence of individual sacrifice [765]; the castle a Cretan labyrinth (997–1000) that is erotically reconfigured as a celebration of claustrophilia [1523–25]). Unlike postmodern experiments in creative play where excessive attention to illusionism is deployed 'to mask the absence of a profound reality'⁴⁸ the consciously simulated images of the Baroque drama are signs that are never allowed to fall away from substance. As Act II demonstrates, this is most

46 See Ordoñez, 'Woman and Her Text', 12–13; Teresa Scott Soufas, 'Ana Caro's Re-evaluation of the *mujer varonil*', in *The Perception of Women in Spanish Theater of the Golden Age*, ed. Anita K. Stoll & Dawn L. Smith (Lewisburg: Bucknell U. P., 1991), 85–106 (pp. 88–89); Dian Fox, '“¿Qué bien sabéis persuader!”: Petrarch, Don Juan and Ana Caro', *Calíope*, 6 (2000), 35–51 (p. 47).

47 See Quintero, *Gendering the Crown*, 218.

48 See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994), 6.

true of the envious, invisible mistress who subverts the platonic charge of the dialogue most comically when she stumbles onto the stage in the dark.

Indeed the use of the portrait in the plot, as well as 'opening a window onto the problematics of representation and subjectivity', also points to the play's uneasy filtering of its Neoplatonic inscription.⁴⁹ Rather than reflecting the beauty of the female sitter's soul (as reflection of the pure Idea), Rosaura's appropriation of the symbolic position of Lisbella (first introduced as 'el sol de un retrato bello' (358) and the object of the simulated Conde's contemplation), might be considered an encounter of non-identical repetition that exposes the hollow *locus* of Petrarchan exemplarity—an 'embodiment' without ontological coherence or consistency that she quickly abandons for alternative representations. The outcome of Rosaura's emulative, envy-engineered, performance for her rival Lisbella is the latter's transformation from objectified idol into a subject in her own right (leader of the French army and finally monarch);⁵⁰ for Rosaura it is the concealing of a female body traditionally exploited for display and spectacle. The invisible mistress is an acousmatic presence (in Michel Chion's understanding of the term), a voice that can be heard without the body being seen, and a sort of 'acting shadow'.⁵¹ But it is not a referent-less sign, nor in Deleuze's terms a 'false claimant'.⁵² The paradoxical status that the absence of Rosaura's body acquires in its presence in the second act of the play, and its power over the Conde, is transcribed into the silencing of the erotic content of the source material (displaced into metaphors of light and dark), and into the spoken images of sight and sound that hold the modes of myth and allegory in tantalizing tension. The following two extracts exhibit these issues respectively:

[a]

Rosaura: Ea! entraos a reposar
 que una antorcha os dará aviso.
 Seguidla, seguidla.

49 See Bass, *The Drama of the Portrait*, 11, and on the 'substitute ability of the portrait' and Renaissance adherence to Neoplatonic interpretations, see pp. 21–22.

50 Interestingly Lisbella is the actual 'invisible mistress' of Act II, her role elided after Act I until her strong re-entry on an equal footing with Rosaura in the final scenes.

51 Michel Chion's concept of the *acousmètre* has often been used by film critics to explore the spectator's cinematic experience in regard to the juxtaposition of sound and image. The *acousmètre* neither prioritizes sound nor image but calls attention to the disjunction between them. It is usefully transferred to theatrical staging of (apparent) disembodied voices because of its significance for audience participation (both inset and outer) as the *acousmètre* leaves open to imagination and interpretation the source of the sound. See Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia U. P., 1999).

52 In a recent analysis of Deleuze's seminal critique of Platonism in *Difference and Repetition*, Joshua Ramey makes the following observation: 'False claimants contradict themselves performatively because their character is not fit for the truth of the idea in which they claim to participate' (Joshua Ramey, *The Hermetic Deleuze. Philosophy and Spiritual Ordeal* [Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 2012], 120–21).

Conde: Esperad, oíd.
 Rosaura: No puedo, adiós.
 Conde: ¿Has oído lo que me pasa Gaulín?
 Gaulín: Y estoy temblendo de oírlo.
 Conde: ¿Quién será aquesta mujer?
 Gaulín: Bruja, monstruo o cocodrilo
 será, pues tanto se esconde,
 allí viene el hacha,
 [...]
 Conde: La luz por mi norte sigo. (1062–75)
*(Sale un hacha por una puerta y váse por otra, el Conde,
 se va tras ella [...])*

[b]

Conde: Pues, ¿por qué
 cuando me tenéis rendido
 en vuestro poder y estáis
 satisfecha de lo dicho,
 me negáis vuestra hermosura,
 privando el mejor sentido
 del gusto en su bello objeto?
 Rosaura: No apuremos silogismos,
 confieso que es el más noble,
 más pronto, más advertido.
 que los demás, pero yo,
 para acrisolar lo fino
 del oro de vuestra fe,
 árbitro hago el oído,
 en su juicio afianzado
 de mis dichas lo propicio
 con misterioso decoro,
 demás que me habéis visto
 y os he parecido bien. (1019–37)

Renaissance Neoplatonic models of desire (and there is much filtering of Ficino in particular) are inscribed in the exaggerated style of the couple's dialogue (e.g. 1348–49) but are delivered in/through the frame of embellished scenography and intensely visualized conceptions of performance. Thus the drama itself seems to play one sensory experience off against the other and the characters elude the ur-narratives that would otherwise contain them. Perceived in this way, we might say that the theatrical moment gives rise to

a defamiliarized form of *allegoresis* that encourages spectators also to transcend the limits of typification, and so to confront rather than escape from 'uncomfortable associations'.⁵³ In foregrounding the generative axis of theatre in performance, Caro's play not only overcomes the metaphoric moralizing of its intertexts, but seems to strive against complicity and containment. The 'invisible mistress' is, in this respect, the audience's analogue. We might, like Mladen Dolar, find surplus in such identification, see the acousmatic voice as a 'plus de corps', 'the spirituality of the corporeal'—or the 'flesh of the soul'.⁵⁴ However we articulate it, Rosaura's elusive presence on stage does not emanate from a void, just as the illusion-making devices of the play are not socio-politically disenfranchized. At the end of Act II Rosaura, recognizably imperial to all but the Conde, sends him back to fight in France with a reminder of 'la obligación de quien eres' (1465); at the end of Act III she practises what she has preached.

Ultimately Caro's drama reminds us that 'truth' is the product of the struggle of simultaneous and conflicting stimuli for acknowledgement. The text of the play leaves us with many questions: for instance, where does the exercise of power lie (in law, in the people, in the imagination)?; what is the role of reason/of emotion in decision-taking and in ruling? Performance would (and should) provoke new ones, and perhaps also point towards transgression in answers to the old. It is not impossible that in bringing to life Rosaura and Lisbella (women whose actions throughout re-categorize the conventionally heroic), that actors would find irony in their final utterances and a mechanism to elude closure: 'Ya soy tuya' (Rosaura [2092]) and 'Que obedezco' (Lisbella [2093]). But we have to get past the ending to fully appreciate the import of the 'double movement' that defines Ana Caro's drama—after all, Apuleius had Cupid go up against a whole council of the gods to claim Psyche (and reward her with immortality), but we rarely wonder whether he had his wings clipped in marriage.

53 See Sayre N. Greenfield, *The Ends of Allegory* (London/Ontario: Associated University Presses, 1998), 16. The full quote reads: 'Allegorical reading is seldom capable of radicalism precisely because it provides a metaphoric mechanism of escape from any uncomfortable associations'.

54 See Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 71.